The NCTCUG Journal

Keeping Up
By Paul Howard (NCTCUG)

Are you a techtoyaholic? I know I am. When APCUG colleague Gabe Goldberg does his Gadgets Grabbag presentation for our user groups, I can't sleep for three days, thinking about all those nifty toys! See (July 2nd, 2008 Mtg.) — http://www.nctcug.org/recmtgs.html

I have a severe weakness for flashlights — size doesn't matter, but lumens do! I'm not sure if it's a suppressed fear of the dark (I've never liked horror movies), or that being quite nearsighted from about age ten, I've always wanted lots of light focused on whatever I'm working on. My early favorite, from my career more than 35 years ago as a telephone installer / repairman, was a Lightstick, product of the Justrite Manufacturing Company: http://snipurl.com/3l09s Best described as a slightly flattened steel can, it holds 4 "D" cells, has a swiveling head with a focusing reflector that allows spot or flood light diffusion, along with a belt clip, and a loop handle / hanger on the bottom. It's still being sold, although a quick Internet search of about three companies showed the lowest price around $47. That's kind of pricey for a flashlight that still uses an incandescent lamp.

I've got one that I salvaged years ago from a dumpster, with a loose belt clip I repaired with 'liquid solder' and damaged battery terminal connections that required careful attention with long nosed pliers. The beauty of this light was that, in virtually any situation, and tight working environments, with the swivel head and focusing beam, along with the Lightstick's shape, belt clip, and hanging loop, you could find a way to place it and get light on the work area — even when you had to climb a pole to a cable terminal at night.

Over the years, I acquired a number of Maglites, http://www.maglite.com wonderfully rugged flashlights made from aircraft grade aluminum, with focusing reflector systems that work quite well. An outfit called Nite-Ize http://niteize.com/ supplies a variety of accessories to make the Maglites more versatile,

Inside

Moving On To Vista – Part 7

By Neil Stahfest, Shareware Librarian, Tacoma Area PC User Group, WA
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Does your computer go to sleep? By default, Windows Vista was designed to go to sleep after an hour of inactivity. This feature is primarily designed to conserve laptop battery power. Microsoft estimates that allowing a PC to go to sleep during off hours, as compared to leaving it on all the time, saves anywhere from $55 to $70 a year so this feature has some value for desktop users. Of course the amount you save will vary depending on the type of monitor that you use and your local electric utility rates. Here in the Pacific Northwest, with our relatively low electric rates, I suspect that the savings will be something less than $55 a year but multiply that amount by the number of computer monitors that you have and you can probably fill your gas tank once or twice. ;-)

With Windows XP, application programs can veto a user's request for the PC to go to enter sleep mode. Consequently, laptop owners who thought they had put their computer to sleep, might discover a few hours later that the machine had remained on and the battery had been drained. Vista features a group policy tool that can enforce power management settings over the wishes of application programs. Vista's new sleep option, allows you to wake up your computer to install security updates, while letting it remain in the power-saving mode the rest of the time.

So how can you control this energy/battery saving feature?

1) Go to your **Control Panel** and select the **Classic View**

2) Double-click on **Power Options**

3) The right pane of the **Power Option Window** shows the main power plans which are currently available or in use. In the top left pane of the **Power Option Window** you'll see the following options:

Require a password on wakeup is self explanatory.

Chose what power buttons to use opens a new window where you can select implementing the sleep mode by pressing a sleep button, the power button or closing a laptop's lid. Actually there are a number of options available here, including Hibernate and Shut Down.

Choose what closing the lid does is similar to the above option (it even uses the same window).

Create a power plan offers three basic plans plus an option to create customized plans.

Choose when to turn off the display offers sixteen different time intervals to activate this feature.

Change when the computer sleeps works the same as the turn off the display feature.

Adjust the display brightness obviously controls the screen's brightness and the amount of power consumed by the screen.

So make your choice(s). Save power, your battery and the environment.

On another topic, when I first tested the pre-release version of Windows Vista I noted that file transfers seemed to be much slower than with Windows XP. This problem was not corrected when Vista was released to the general public. The problem becomes very noticeable when you try to transfer very large files from one partition to another. Maybe it will be corrected when Vista Service Pack 1 is released but, in case it isn't, here's how you can fix it.

The cause for slow file transfers is apparently something called Remote Differential Compression which is used when files are transferred from one partition to another. The fix is to disable Remote Differential Compression. How do you do that?

Using A Restore Point

By Larry Bothe, honorary member of the Fox Valley PC Association, IL
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Recently, while in a big hurry to get a lot of work done before leaving on vacation, my computer started up with a blank screen. No mouse, no images, no text, no error message, no nothing. I had no choice but to just shut it down using the on/off switch. I then tried to start it again, this time watching very carefully to see what happened (I was getting coffee the first time). It went through the BIOS start (black & white screens with text) OK; then gave a brief color flash of the Windows XP logo, then nothing. The hard drive activity light was flashing so I knew the machine was trying. I was encouraged by the Windows startup sounds, but never got an image.

I recalled that the evening before I had received a warning from my computer security software that some program was trying to make a change to something it thought was a danger. I was in a hurry and I OK'd it without reading it thoroughly. Thinking back I decided that perhaps I had OK'd a bad thing that resulted in changing some setting in the operating system (Windows XP Home). I then crossed my fingers and tried starting the machine in Safe Mode. You do that by turning on the machine and then repeatedly pushing the F8 key until you get the black & white screen that lets you select the startup mode.

1) From the **Start button**, open the **Control Panel**.

2) Go to the **Programs and Features** section.

3) In the left pane select **Turn on or off Windows features**.

4) Uncheck the option for **Remote Differential Compression**.

That's all there is to it! Enjoy your faster file transfers.

Using the arrow keys I selected Safe Mode and pressed Enter. I lucked out and it started in Safe Mode.

Once in Safe Mode I decided to restore the system settings to an earlier point in time when everything worked correctly. In Windows XP every time you shut down your computer it takes a snapshot of your operating system settings and saves them into what is called a restore point. If you later install a program or get attacked by a virus that alters your system settings such that the machine no longer runs right you can in theory go back to some prior point in time when the machine ran correctly and restore the settings to what they were then. That's called a restore point. Note that you have to uninstall the offending program or get rid of the virus before you attempt a restore. Otherwise the program or virus will just alter your settings once again. Also note that going back to some prior restore point will not delete any files you created and saved after the restore point you select. You won't lose any data. However, I had never tried this before so didn't quite know what to expect.

In order to get into the routine you do Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Restore. After clicking System Restore you select Restore my computer to an earlier time, and then follow the prompts. The routine lets you choose a date you want to restore to. I had to think about that. It ran well the previous day, but that was the day the settings were changed. I chose to go back 2 days to be sure I was well before the bad thing occurred. I finished the restore procedure and the machine restarted perfectly. It turned out to be a really good use of the restore point feature in XP.

I mentioned above that you must first get rid of whatever changed your settings in the first place before you do the restore. If you don't then you risk that it will simply alter your settings once again and you'll be right back where you were with a sick machine. In my
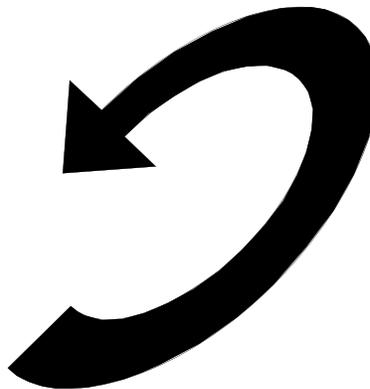
Evaluating Your Anti-Spyware Program

By Vinny La Bash, Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.
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For many years the most acute danger to your computer was some kind of destructive virus. Today the danger has shifted from software that is programmed to destroy files, corrupt programs, and disable systems to something more insidious, and perhaps even more treacherous. This threat comes in two broad categories known as Spyware and Trojan Horses.

Spyware started out as a stealth program surreptitiously installed on your system to track your web surfing habits. The developers of spyware didn't want to damage your computer. They wanted only to sell you something. That may be annoying, but there is nothing criminal about it.

A Trojan Horse is a program that pretends to be something other than what it really is. For example, a screensaver could be designed to install a program that will take over your system to forward spam to other machines. Trojan Horses have been used to initiate denial of service attacks, where the target such as a bank, credit card service or other high profile web site becomes so saturated with external requests that it cannot respond to legitimate traffic.

When selecting an anti-spyware program, start out by selecting one with a comprehensive signatures database. The best anti-spyware programs have databases that can recognize more than 750,000 different kinds of spyware and Trojan Horse programs. Read the documentation or call the company. This is important.

The best signatures database won't do you any good if it isn't updated frequently. The bad guys never seem to rest. They release new poison daily. Don't buy any solutions that require manual updates. You have better things to do. Insist on automatic updates.

Another important capability is active monitoring of your system. Wouldn't you rather prevent a malicious program from installing rather than removing it after the damage has been done? Avoid any program that removes infections found only after conducting a manual scan. This probably means avoiding some otherwise adequate free programs. There's an old saying about getting what you pay for. The best anti-spyware programs prevent spyware and Trojan Horses from ever being installed on your system.

haste to fix my computer I didn't take that corrective action, so when it restarted the malware once again tried to alter my settings. And once again my security software caught it and presented a warning. Being a bit smarter this time I clicked on Deny instead of Allow (OK). After the machine came up running properly I used my security

software (Zone Alarm Security Suite) to do a full system scan for any malicious software. It did indeed find one bad thing (in addition to several spyware items), which I told it to remove. I guess that was it because I have had no more trouble. No, I can't tell you exactly what the offending malicious software was because I didn't write it down, and I have slept since then.

I learned several lessons from this little episode. A good suite of computer security orograms is worth every penny you pay for it. Even cautious computer users like me can get caught up in a virus problem. When your security software presents a warning you need to pay attention; I won't be so quick to click on Allow in the future. Finally, the System Restore feature in Windows XP is worth its weight in owl feathers. It is easy to use and very effective under the right circumstances.

Larry Bothe is an associate member of CAEUG and an honorary member of FVPCA. He was President of CAEUG for a time back in the 90's when he lived in the Chicago area. Larry presently resides in southern Indiana where he is retired from the plastics industry and currently teaches people to fly airplanes. He also performs pilot examinations for the FAA.

Go for a program that allows you to customize your scans. We don't all use our computers in the same way. Some people require more comprehensive scans than others. If you are constantly browsing the internet, you are likely to benefit from a daily scan that checks active memory, system folders, the registry, and all hard drives. If you rarely use the internet or find yourself visiting the same six sites over and over, a weekly scan may be all you need.

You should be able to schedule unattended updates and scans. Your machine should be yours to use as you wish. Any decent anti-spyware program should be able to run in the background unattended, and not require interrupting your activities. The program should work according to your preferences, not the other way around. Choose a program that permits unattended maintenance and administration.

It's also important that an unattended scan can quarantine infections without requiring intervention from you. Why do some anti-spyware programs ask if you want to remove infections? Of course you do! Of all the features in anti-spyware programs, that is the dumbest.

There are innumerable derivations and iterations of spyware being created. This makes it difficult for even the best anti-spyware programs to catch and destroy them. If you open the Processes tab in Windows Task Manager, you will observe the Process Manager in action. You will see a list of objects running on your system. Some of them are applications like word processors. Others are mysterious entities that don't provide a clue as so what they do, but you can't run Windows effectively without them. Among them would be Windows Explorer, Internet Explorer, Media Center, Windows Mobile Control Center, and many others.

Beyond shutting down a process or resetting its priority, there isn't much a non-specialist can do with this feature. Clever programmers can create spyware that won't show up in the Process Manager. Any decent anti-spyware program has to have its own built-in process manager that will recognize, track down, and eliminate malevolent software that may not even be in the signatures database.

Anti-spyware programs should be able to monitor programs that load when Windows starts up. There are many very sophisticated spyware programs that to not show up in the Process Monitor or in Control Panel's Add/Remove section. If your anti-spyware program lacks this capability, find another one.

Assuming your anti-spyware program has the capabilities mentioned above, it is an excellent choice for individuals. However, businesses or organizations with multiple computers will require even more. Whoever is in charge of PCs will not have time to manually monitor or administrate individual machines. It is simply impractical in a large organization for support staff to visit every workstation, apply updates, schedule scans, and ensure that infestations are removed. If this applies to you, look for a program with a centralized administration console. This capability has the unfortunate drawback of being quite expensive, but the time saved generally justifies the cost.

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Review: Pinnacle PCTV HD Ultimate Stick

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Some computer products just have a 'wow' factor on first sight; the Pinnacle PCTV HD Stick is one of those devices. It is a TV tuner on a USB stick and not just any TV tuner but one that is capable of pulling down Standard Definition (SD) and High Definition (HD) content to your PC. On seeing the Pinnacle presentation on their PCTV HD Stick at the APCUG Convention in 2008, I have been itching to get my hands on one. I was imagining a new widescreen computer monitor coupled with this device as a means of having a really cheap HDTV. So I purchased a new widescreen monitor (22") and the PCTV HD Stick. The USB device comes in 3 flavors, PCTV HD ($69.99), PCTV HD Pro ($99.99) and the top of the line PCTV HD Ultimate ($129.99). There is also an internal card version ($79.99). All these devices are designed for Windows XP and are Vista Certified. There is a separate device with similar features for Mac users ($129.99). I opted for the 'Ultimate' model because of its onboard memory DVR and software. More on that later, but the Ultimate is a plug and play that allows you to start watching and record SD and HDTV almost immediately.

Packaging

The packaging contains a mini remote control including batteries, a portable telescoping high-gain antenna, A/V adapter cable, A/V adaptor cable, a USB extender cable and the usual manuals and CDs. With the Ultimate model you also get a neat soft leatherette carrying pouch.

Setting Up

Setting up the PCTV Ultimate could not be easier. This model has all the software preinstalled including the Personal Video Recorder (PVR) that allows you to record up to 2 hours of video. You just plug it in and follow the onscreen instructions and start enjoying live TV within seconds. The on-board memory on the Ultimate can also be used to store additional files. You run setup once, even if you use the device on a different PC, the settings and preference are stored on the device.

You have 3 options in setting up the PCTV:

1) Antenna (for digital/analog TV reception)
2) Cable (analog TV reception)
3) Capture from Cable/Satellite Set-top Box

For this review we will be using Option 1 – Antenna (digital/analog TV reception). During setup, the PCTV will scan for SD and HD signals via the included antenna. The antenna is designed for digital and analog TV reception in regions with fair to good signal coverage. When using the antenna, it should be fully extended in the upright position as high as possible and near a window. The base of the antenna is magnetic so it should not be placed near a cathode ray tube monitor, television or similar equipment as the electromagnetic field of such devices might deteriorate the signal quality. Also be careful with the magnetic base around other objects that are sensitive to magnetic forces – i.e. PC hard drive. In my region I was able to download all the local SD and HD stations available within my region via the antenna.

Software

When you first install the PCTV HD Ultimate Stick, it checks whether all the required drivers and the .NET 2.0 Framework are already on your computer and, if necessary, installs them. After the initial startup, every time you start the program, a TV screen appears immediately on your desktop. The integrated memory on the PCTV HD Ultimate Stick is divided into 2 different areas or drives.

⊙ A re-writable memory area (removable media area) with the TVCenter Pro program and available memory for recorded shows or other user data. The drive is labeled PCTV flash.

⊙ A read-only memory area (CD-ROM area) contains the drivers. This drive is labeled PCTV Start.

Also included in the package is Pinnacle Studio QuckStart that allows you to edit your recordings or home movies and transfer them to DVD, complete with custom menus and soundtracks.

Controls

The package comes with a full-featured remote control. Although small in size it does give complete control of the PCTV. If you elect to use Windows Media Center, the included remote will not work. You will have to purchase a compatible Windows Media Center remote that is available from Pinnacle.

Display

The first time Pinnacle TVCenter Pro is accessed, you will see the Player. This screen can be full-screen or resized to suit. There are navigation icons that select settings, channels, TV or Radio and the program guide.

FM Radio

As sort of an added bonus, during setup PCTV stick also scans for available internet radio signals for play back on your PC. It categorizes them by genre rather than call letters. Unfortunately, the software does not provide any other information regarding the available stations or for the music that is being played.

Picture Quality and Sound Quality

The quality of picture and sound is dependent on your monitor and speakers. The PCTV HD stick is capable of providing digital sound, SD and HD quality picture that if is available within your region.

Windows Media Center

If you have a PC equipped with Microsoft Windows Vista Home Premium or Ultimate or Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005 and you want to watch and record TV using the Windows Media Center application, then you will have to run TV setup in that application. I'm running Windows Vista Ultimate on my PC and using the Windows Media Center software for my TV viewing and recording, but you can use either product. There is not a conflict between the included software and Windows Media Center. However, the Windows Media Center software overrides the included TVCenter Pro software for TV viewing and recording. The included remote does not work with Windows Media Center; however you can select channels directly by keyboard input and/or by mouse when viewing TV via Windows Media Center. You

can also opt to purchase a compatible Media Center Remote control that is available from Pinnacle for $29.99. Again, to get the PCTV HD stick to work with Windows Media Center is the matter of selecting the TV setup in Windows Media Center and following the onscreen instructions. Window Media Center will recognize the device and do its own scan and download a TV guide that is used to identify the channels and for time shifting. The time shifting feature allows you to record your favorite TV shows and play them back at a later time. Windows Media Center does not support some of the onboard memory features of the PCTV HD Ultimate stick.

Conclusion

I now have my cheap HDTV and so far I have not been disappointed. The PCTV HD is pulling free off the air HD signals and displaying them on my monitor in full HD. The PCTV HD Ultimate Stick is a slick ultra-portable USB device that will allow you to watch and record SD and free HD TV. The TV tuner and personal video recorder software run directly from the Stick's on-board flash memory, so you can plug it into any PC and start watching and recording TV in seconds – no installation required.

It supports both analog (NTSC) and digital (ATSC) TV signals. The tuner hardware is also ready for ClearQAM (unencrypted digital cable).

You can record up to 2 hours of TV directly to the stick for playback on any PC and save recordings to your hard drive in MPEG-1/2 or DivX formats or even direct-to-DVD.
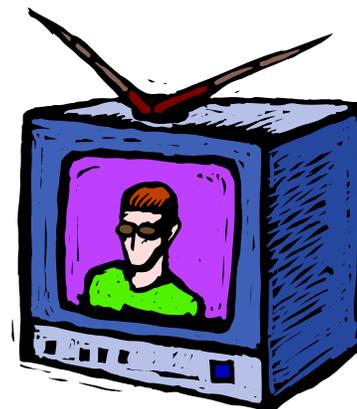
Review: Roxio Easy Media Creator Suite v.10

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Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups

Roxio, a division and brand of Sonic Solutions, has been a leader in burning software for many years. I personally have used the product since it was distributed by Adaptec several years ago. The CD/DVD burning software today far exceeds the basic functions that existed in those early days. Roxio Easy Media Creator (EMC) will accomplish so much more than the basic burning tasks and is now a full featured suite.

Doing this review has allowed me to explore and appreciate the many applications within this suite. Because EMC is so comprehensive I will provide an overview in this article but follow up with more details in future issues of our newsletter.

Before I start boasting about some of these neat applications I must discuss some installation issues. The product would not install on my primary computer! After trying several times to install under various scenarios I checked for possible solutions using Roxio's web product support and also their user forum. None of those sources provided any clues so I connected with technical phone support. I was quite surprised that the wait time was very small and the technician was professional and extremely competent. Unfortunately after almost two hours of phone support the problem was not solved.

The tech support effort involved major system modifications including deletion of all files associated with my original EMC version 9, my Nero burner software, a complete registry purge line by line of anything remotely associated with or influenced by Roxio software, removal of all anti-virus software and firewalls, elimination of all startup files except system essentials and running registry clean utilities. Nothing worked! A trouble report was left open but I never received any further calls. In their users forum I did find one other person with the exact same problem and no solution.

Fortunately I have a couple of other computers at my house so I tried installing the version 10 on both an older desktop and on my primary laptop system. The install went smoothly on both of those systems. So until I get a chance to rebuild my primary desktop I won't know if I can ever use the latest version on it. On a side note before trying to install EMC version 10 I had version 9 successfully working. After all the system changes I could no longer load my EMC version 9. So now I struggled with that problem for a few days. Once again not finding any online solutions I contacted a phone support tech who was able to direct me to a download utility that cleared the problem and allowed me once again install version 9.

While the above debacle was frustrating don't let it deter you from considering the purchase of this capable applications suite. So let's look at why you should consider owning this product.

Once you get past the install you will see a super clean interface with applications divided into seven primary areas; Audio, Data and Backup, Copy, Media and Devices, Photo, Video, and Tools. Each application provides another set of choices. Audio has (13), Data and Backup (5), Copy (5) Media and Devices (2), Photo (9), Video (11), and Tools (8). Now that is a huge chest of applications at your disposal. If you were to purchase each primary application separately it would cost you a few hundred dollars. This package sells for about $100 but if you watch for sales you can buy it for much less.

When you think of Roxio and burning software the primary reason most people purchase the product is for those tools. The Copy and Data and Backup modules take care of those basic requirements along with some other goodies. For anyone familiar with an older version, you will still find the original Creator Classic still there but spruced up. That old standby is quite the workhorse. You select the type and size of disc you want to burn and it will keep you updated on available space as you move files or folders you want to burn into a holding area. Once your files and folders are selected you can burn your CD/DVD directly or make an image for later burning. Of course you have advanced options to define the type of disc, speed, copies, etc. You can also make a bootable or multimedia disc and go directly to creating disc labels of your burn project.

The backup module provides capability to be selective of the files you want backed up or restored and at what frequency. If you want more powerful options then you will be provided an upgrade link. A range of backup devices and media including Blu-ray discs and HD DVD discs are supported. Large files can be automatically spanned across multiple discs as required.

The Audio module provides thirteen selections that cover just about everything you could possibly want to do with audio. All the expected tools are there to rip CD's into MP3 files or create audio CDs from other formats. You can make custom CD's with fades, effects and mixing. Tools are there to edit song information and to do batch conversions to formats of your choice. One module allows you to instantly capture any audio playing on your computer, including streaming radio. There is one utility "Convert LPs and Tapes" that I was especially enthused about. At our meeting we have had the question of how to convert LPs and Tapes asked many times in the past. While there are several methods to accomplish this, Roxio EMC has made it easy and crystal clear with this application. So for those of you that have a desire to do this you should give Roxio EMC serious consideration.

The Photo application contains a full featured photo suite with powerful editing, effects and touchup tools. It is complete with all the ancillary things you want to do with photos such as creating slideshows, panoramas, albums, greeting cards, calendars and layout templates. You can quickly optimize a group of photos for sending email.

The Video application is another full featured suite for importing, editing, customizing and exporting video into various formats. Included is CinePlayer a full featured video player. The features are similar to those found in Pinnacle Studio or Adobe Premier. While some of Roxio EMC tools are not as robust as the leaders you will find some tools not available in the others. It may not be as flexible as the stand alone programs but it will be easier for the novice. If you are a true video buff then even if you own other video software you would also want to have EMC in your software chest.

The smallest stand-alone module is Media Manager that enables users to easily browse, manage, share and protect their media files. The final application module is Tools. This module is used for creating disc labels, obtaining drive information, erasing discs, creating virtual disc drives and a few other assorted utilities. Roxio EMC is Vista compatible and includes gadgets for doing things directly from the desktop.

I'm certain most computer users will find enough applications on Roxio Easy Media Creator to make the investment worthwhile. If this review has captured your interest pay a visit to Roxio's website at http://www.roxio.com/. They have some great videos that will demonstrate these neat features

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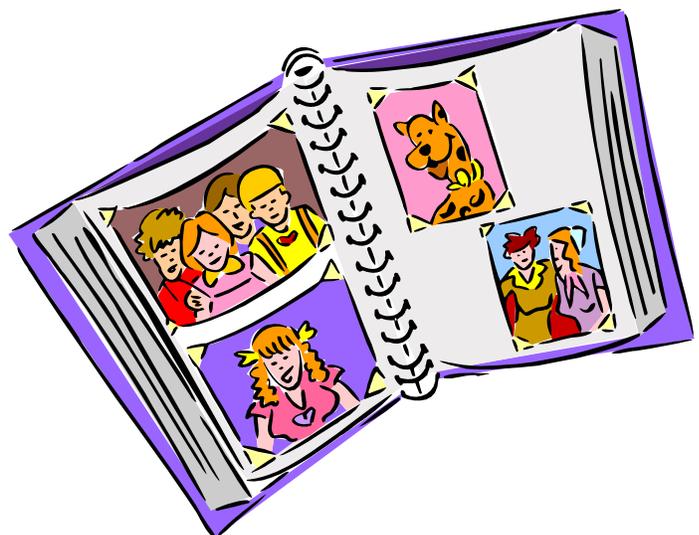
E-Mailing Photographs

By Richard Kennon, Editor, Amador Computer Users Group, CA
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First, we **must** understand that photograph (image) size in the camera and in the computer is measured in **pixels**. These are the basic dots of color that make the picture. **Do not** pay any attention to anything that says "inches" or "pixels per inch." These terms are meaningless when we are considering a picture either in the camera or in the computer. They may come into play later if we want to print the photo on paper. But, that is another subject for another time. For now, we think only of pixels. Most cameras record too many pixels to e-mail. For instance a 6 megapixel camera will make a picture about 3000 pixels wide by 2000 pixels tall and the file size may be several megabytes. Our screens are usually only about 1000 pixels wide (some are larger and some smaller). So, if we e-mail the native picture, it will be wider than the screen for the recipient <u>and</u> the file will be so large, it may take "forever" to download to the recipient's computer. It is possible the service provider will not even accept it.

There are two things we must do to make a photo e-mailable. The first is to *resize* or *resample* the picture. We want to change the picture width from 3000 pixels to 800 pixels, for instance. This process is called resizing or resampling. We have to pick the best 800 pixels out of the 3000 to represent our photo. Well, no, that is not exactly correct but it simplifies things to think of it that way. We don't have to worry about it because a lot of very smart programmers have developed ways (algorithms) to help us. Just remember, you want to resize or resample to get the photo down to a size convenient for e-mailing. I usually use 800 pixels or 900 pixels width for pictures I attach to e-mails.

The second thing to do to make a photo e-mailable is to save it in **JPEG format (.jpg).** That is a format that reduces file size a lot and picture quality a little so the picture can be downloaded more quickly and still be nice to look at. Some software programs give you choices of compression amount with numbers ranging from 1 to 10. One will result in a very small file but the picture quality will not be good at all. A 10 will give the very best quality but with a very large file size. A reasonable compromise is to use 5 or 6. I usually use 6.

How do you do this? First, I will describe how to do it with a free Microsoft program. Then I will try to look at some other programs.

Microsoft Power Toys for XP has a Resize Pictures toy that is slick and easy but feedback says it only works on XP. It can be downloaded at http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/xppowertoys.mspx. Right click on an image name or thumbnail in Explorer or My Computer and choose **Resize Pictures.** You are limited to four specific sizes but they are good choices. They don't tell us what compression they are using but the results look OK. Unless you tell them under **Advanced** to replace the image in the file, it will make a copy. That's good. They will add the word, "Large", "Medium" or "Small" to the end of the name you have chosen.
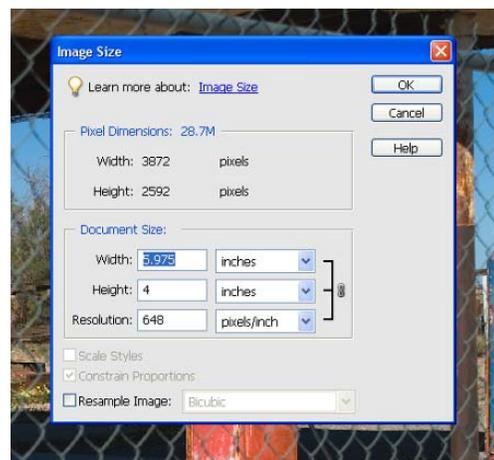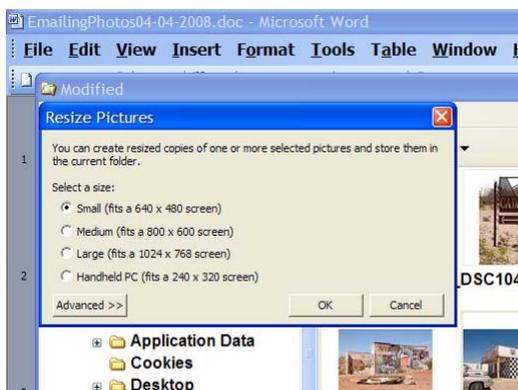
If you are happy with this solution, then read no further. But, if you want to use a picture editing program, maybe this will help.

Photoshop Elements

In Photoshop Elements 5, click on **Image>Resize>Image Size** and this window will pop up. Note that there is some garbage at the bottom about "inches" but we will ignore that. First we will click the **Resample Image** box. That puts the Pixel Dimensions in play and that is what we want. I selected the Width box and changed the width to 800 pixels. Since the **Constrain Proportions** box is selected, that is all I have to do.

Note, down at the bottom, that we have several choices of sampling algorithms. This is frosting on the cake. I read somewhere that I should use **Bicubic Sharper** when downsizing so that is what I do. Most programs don't give us all these choices. Then we should click on **File>Save As** and give the photo a new name. I often just use the same name and add "_800px" so the next time I will know it is ready to e-mail. Here we can choose the JPEG format and the compression amount. Photoshop Elements 6 is out now and sells for about $100. If you are able to spend that much and want one of the best editing programs, I highly recommend it.

Picasa

Let's look at Picasa2. It is a free program from Google and looks really good but I do not have much experience with it. By all means, try it first because the price is right! When it comes to e-mailing photographs, it is a little more automated but not any easier to use than Elements. First, click on **Tools>Options>E-Mail**. Then select the width you want in pixels. There are six choices. Then click on **Apply** and **OK**.

The next step is to click on **File>E-Mail** and you will get three choices of how you want to e-mail your photos. Fortunately, I use Outlook Express so my choice is listed.

When I clicked on Outlook Express, an e-mail page popped up with the photo attached. At this point we can write something else on the e-mail and send it. I recommend this so the recipient will know it is really from you and not something sent out by a virus. When I receive e-mails that only say "Attached", I Delete them without looking at the attachment. This saved me one time when I received a virus from my sister-in-law that she did not know she sent. She spent weeks and dollars getting her computer back up. Oh, I digress. If you want to send more than one picture (and, who doesn't?), you must select the picture and click on the Hold button near the bottom of the screen. Do this for each photo you want to send and they will all be attached to the e-mail. The program automatically chooses JPEG format and a compression ratio but does not tell you. That is OK as the pictures I tried looked good. Picasa2 has considerable capability for editing photos in many respects. Try it!

There are many other editing programs that I haven't mentioned and have no experience with. In all cases you want to change the picture's size in pixels by resizing or resampling. Pay no attention to anything that says "inches" as that will have no meaning for this process. Sometime later we will talk about printing pictures and then we will use inches.

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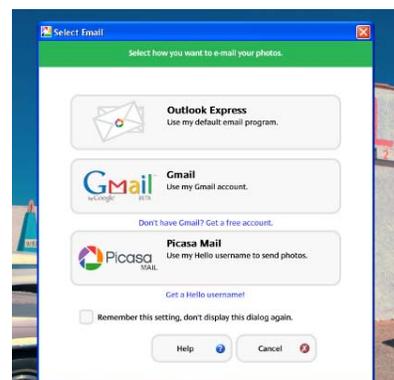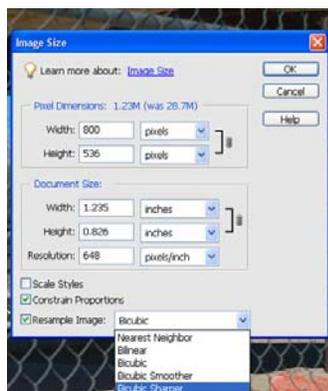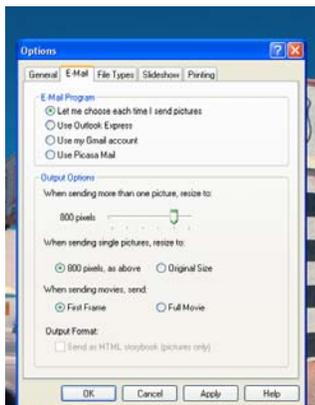
For Anybody Who Has Thought About Trying Linux

By Drew Kwashnak, Linux SIG Leader, Danbury Area Computer Society, CT
www.dacs.org dacseditor(at)dacs.org

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups

For anybody who has thought about trying Linux, it has become easier than ever before with Ubuntu 8.04 LTS Hardy Heron. As with most Linux distributions, Ubuntu is available as a free download and is freely distributable. It is even available already installed on Dell computers. The most common method is downloading the ISO image from Ubuntu's website (http://www.ubuntu. com) and burning it onto a CD.

From the site, you can download the Desktop version or Server for 32-bit and 64-bit systems. There is even an option to download what is called an alternative version which is just the installer and does not include the LiveCD portion, which also includes an installer. If you are like me, until a couple months ago, and living on dial-up or you do not have a CD burner handy or just don't want to put in that much effort then you can order a free CD through the corporate sponsor of Ubuntu, Canonical, ShipIt department.

I have been very pleased with the speed with which their CDs arrive. Alternatively, the website contains links to vendors where you can buy the CDs from under $5 to more, and they can handle large orders as well.

Once you have your CD in your hot little hands, trying Ubuntu is as simple as placing it in your CD-ROM tray and rebooting your system. If system will boot from the CD and after a short moment you'll be greeted with the Ubuntu welcome screen.

If you want to "try before you buy," then you can choose the default "Try Ubuntu without any changes to your computer" and your hard drive will not be touched during your session unless you choose to. You don't even need a hard drive to select this option; you just will not be able to install it from the session.

If you are more certain or just daring then you can go straight into the installer and in about 60 minutes (45 minutes if you know what Different Strokes For Anybody Who Has Thought About Trying Linux by Drew Kwashnak you are doing) you're booting to your new Ubuntu installation.

Ubuntu will scan your hardware and load the modules and drivers necessary for your system. If you have hardware that has proprietary drivers available, Linux cannot include them in the CD for legal reasons. Ubuntu works around this by providing a Restricted Drivers tool that lists all such hardware found on your system and provides the ability to download and install the necessary drivers in a click or two, legally.

Now that you have Ubuntu up and running on your system, what can you do? Plenty! Ubuntu brings you a fullfeatured operating system complete with:

- Firefox 3.05 beta web browser

- OpenOffice.org 2.4 full featured office suite compatible with pre-Office 2007 Word, Excel, PowerPoint and some Access files.

Washington Area Computer User Group

WACUG Meeting will be held on October 18, 2008 from 12:30 to 3:30 pm . at the Fairfax County Government Center, 2000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA

You do not need to be a member to attend. For more information on WAC meetings and events, call the WAC AnswerLine (voice) at (703) 370-7649.
Also see WAC's Web Site at

    http://www.wacug.org/

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NCTCUG.ORG WACUG.ORG
CPCUG.ORG
For more information see:

http://www.nctcug.org/waugp.html

- Evolution personal information manager for email and calendar goodness, a Microsoft Outlook user can feel comfortable with. There is even plug-ins to allow Evolution to access existing Microsoft Exchange servers.

- Pidgin multi-protocol instant messenger including Yahoo, MSN, AIM, Jabber, IRC and more.

- Gimp (GNU Image Manipulation Program), a powerful Photoshop-like image editing program that includes filters, layers and a host of goodies.

- F-Spot image manager for categorizing and minor editing of all of your pictures as well as easily importing pictures from your digital camera.

- And much, MUCH more…

If Ubuntu doesn't come with a particular application, thousands of free applications are available from the Ubuntu online repository which are easily installed and updated from the Synaptic package manager.

When you decide to install Ubuntu onto your hard drive or virtual machine you only need to click the "Install" icon on the desktop to start the process. After seven or so easy questions the installer will copy the files over to the hard disk. Depending on your system's speed this could take about 60 minutes, more or less. It will even detect if you have Windows installed and offer to transfer over your files and compatible settings from your Windows accounts!

Of course, if the limitations of the LiveCD, such as settings are not saved from session to session, and you are hesitant to partition and install the full operating system on your hard drive Ubuntu offers yet another alternative called Wubi. Wubi is, from the Ubuntu website: "Wubi is an officially supported Ubuntu in-

staller for Windows users that can bring you to the Linux world with a single click. Wubi allows you to install and uninstall Ubuntu as any other Windows application, in a simple and safe way. Are you curious about Linux and Ubuntu? Trying them out has never been easier!"

Wubi can be downloaded as an .exe file directly. With Linux the installation is not the end, only the beginning!

Whether you try the LiveCD, Wubi or a full installation you will find a wealth of quality applications, refreshing freedom and a community unlike any other!

If you have problems, questions or want to find out more then you need look no further than the third Wednesday of every month for the DACS Linux SIG at 7:30 p.m. in the DACS Resource Center!

Links

Ubuntu: http://www.ubuntu.com

Get Ubuntu: http://www.ubuntu.com/getubuntu

ShipIt: https://shipit.ubuntu.com/

Drew Kwashnak: Has been losing more nights of sleep with Linux since 2002 and just can't keep from downloading and trying the latest versions! When not working with Linux he works with ASP.NET and Microsoft SQL Server for a small financial company. He is also the DACS Linux SIG leader and a father of 3.

with various options for getting the light on the work, multi-tool pouches, etc. I was disappointed by their modification for the Mini-Maglite (2 AA cells) that added a switch and an LED in place of the regular hi-intensity lamp. It may have extended battery life, but seriously degraded the unit's brightness.

A friend with a serious SCUBA diving hobby gave me an Underwater Kinetics UK4AA, a rugged, plastic cased flashlight using, not surprisingly, 4 AA cells. This flashlight is only slightly larger than the MagLites that use 2 AA cells, and typical versions mount on diving masks and firemen's helmets. UK offers a broad range of flashlights for a variety of demanding uses.
http://www.uwkinetics.com/product/69

Over the last few years, the availability of high intensity LEDs have spawned an explosion of flashlights of various shapes, sizes, and battery requirements. New and brighter flashlights make regular appearances at user group meetings, although we've yet to see the tactical flashlights sold for military and police use — read "blindingly bright" and "expensive". There are also lights with built-in, hand crank generators that I have several models of, carrying the Dura-Pro label. Lighting products from this company now carry the MegaBRITE brand.
http://durapro.com/mb_home.html

Recently, I was again tempted by a small flashlight that seemed to offer significant brightness from a single AA cell. Hanging at the checkout (impulse buy! — guess why there are never enough cashiers at a store with lots of toys at the check stand?) at Lowes was a "LED Lenser" by Coast Products, a maker of knives, tools, and lighting products. http://snipurl.com/3lcfc
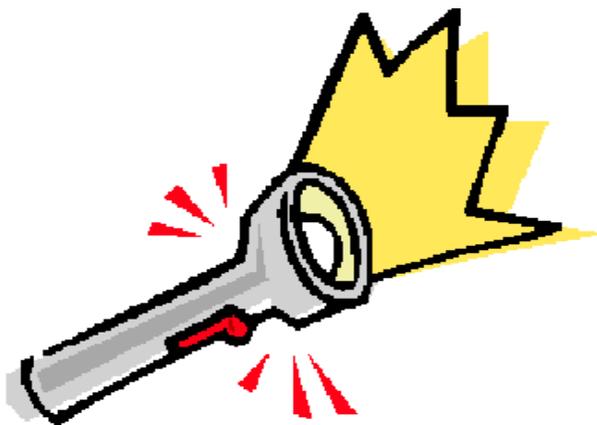
Our friend Mel Mikosinski seems similarly fascinated with LED lighting products. At an August meeting, he showed the gang an impressive collection of LED lights for use around the home, acquired at BJ's Club and WalMart. Several were of the "hockey puck" variety, designed for use under kitchen counters, in cabinets or closets. These allow illumination in places that may resist wiring for AC lamp installation. http://snipurl.com/3lcmq

Other products included a tiny "camp lantern" and a variation of the "hockey puck" lamp on a stalk, that Mel touted for use in power blackouts. Having recently experienced a nine hour power interruption, I could really appreciate the attraction!

What really got my attention, and caused me to race out to BJ's the next day — after bribing my wife to accompany me with a visit to a nearby restaurant, were "LED Micro Task Lights." These seemingly are an ideal solution for lighting a laptop keyboard when giving a presentation in a darkened room. I have several other LED lights I've acquired over the last five years for that purpose, and they were basically flawed. While operating power supplied via a USB port is certainly a plus, the lights I'd previously used provided insufficient illumination, and were awkward to use.

This unit is about the size of a deck of cards, with two telescoping stalks that support the light bar containing the LEDs. Powered by three AAA cells, it has clips to attach to a laptop screen, a wire bail for attaching to a book page — tho' I doubt you'd want to move it as you read each page, and even magnets, to attach to a metal surface. At two to a package for ten bucks, these are, I think, a bargain — especially since it included six Duracell batteries. Unfortunately, this unit isn't shown on the packager's web site yet — model LPL904. http://snipurl.com/3ld6p

Another product from the same company (Leader & Loader Group) are called Wireless LED Task Lights, using 6 LEDs and the same complement of AAA cells (tho' not included in the package) and come two to a blister pack for $20 - model LPL616 . These can sit on a desk or table, and also come with a spring clip for attaching to shelf edges, for example. I plan to use one for illuminating the controls on my home theater receiver, which are difficult to see in the subdued lighting normal in the room. Thanks for finding these treasures, Mel !!

Just Can't Win Department

I hate to own up to how inconsistent my exercise program is — though I'm sure it's obvious from the extra thirty pounds floating about my navel. Some time ago, I got a combo 13" TV and VCR from Circuit City — the plan being to record the "Nightly Business Report" at 6:30 PM every evening, Mon–Fri, on WETA, and then play it back during my normal (read — if I get around to it!) session on the treadmill the next morning.

My treadmill time was so infrequent that I didn't get to the bottom of why I had a lot of extraneous material on the tape, and the Business Report was so hard to find. I kept checking the programming page of the VCR, where I had Monday through Friday set up to record from 6:30–7:00 PM — or so I thought. I finally found the glitch — on Wednesdays, the end time was set to "7:00 a" rather than "7:00 p" so the recorder would run until the next morning — or the end of the tape, which ever came first! At the distance from which I normally watch the TV, the difference between "a" and "p" wasn't really apparent. I think I shoulda stood in bed. <grin>

With the current power options (turn off the monitor after "20 minutes" and sleep "after 2 hours") the computer will wake up and get updates as well as run the scheduled backups. So with a simple change to a power option, I was able to reduce power consumption by approx 76% and save $5.93 per month with out affecting my user experience.

I plan on testing my XP machine next to see what it is costing and to see if it can be reduced. Thanks go to Louise and the rest of the group for a great discussion on energy use. (Louise is a SCUG Board Member at Large.)

To get more info and tips on energy savings try one of Louise Dieden's favorite links:
http://www.energy.gov/forconsumers.htm

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Club Information call: 301-577-7899   **Web Site: www.nctcug.org**

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Article Submissions

Articles, helpful hints, and other items of interest to readers of the NCTCUG Journal are always welcome and will be published as soon as possible after submission. Priority is given to members' contributions. Items may be submitted via modem to the BBS or on diskette. Submissions to the BBS should be uploaded to the Newsletter Conference and a message left for the Editor. Files should be straight ASCII, unformatted, with C/R only at end of paragraphs; no indents for paragraphs should be used. Preferred format for diskettes is MS-DOS 3½ 720k or 1.44Mb. Diskettes in other formats may be submitted but there will be a considerable delay in processing. If absolutely necessary, items may be submitted in hardcopy only but these will also meet with delay.

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The National Capital Tandy Computer Users Group, Inc. is a non-profit [501(c)(3)]organization founded in 1978 to educate users of all Tandy computers and MS-DOS compatible computers. Membership dues are $25.00 (U.S.Funds) per year, with a $5 surcharge for international mail. Membership in NCTCUG includes membership in all SIGs, access to the BBS and software libraries, and subscription to the Journal published 8 times per year. Applications may be obtained at any club meeting, by downloading from the BBS, by calling one of the officers or board members, or by writing to the club. A sample newsletter, membership application and related information may be obtained by enclosing $1 and mailing your request to Jim Rhodes, 201 S. Kensington Street, Arlington VA 22204.

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COMPUCENTER BBS

Is no longer in operation. It has been replaced by the 'compucenter' mailing list at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/compucenter/

If you are moving
Please send your change of address to the club address as soon as possible to avoid missing issues.
                    Thank You!

Going Green

By Jerry Grommes, Past President, Sandwich Computer Users Group, Illinois
www.scug.org ggrommes(at)indianvalley.com

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups

During our June program, there was quite a discussion about whether to leave your computer on verses shutting it off when not in use.

I, personally, like to leave my computers run so they are kept up-to-date with auto updates and backed up with scheduled backups. These tasks are done in the early AM so my computers are fully functional when I sit down to use them.

However, others asked why not just leave them on the nights that the backup runs instead of 24/7. I didn't think it was using much energy by running 24/7 but decided to check it out and run some tests using my "Kill-A-Watt" meter. (Measures watts, amps, hours, kill a watt hours, etc.) I started with my newest computer (which is approx 2 years old and probably the most efficient). This machine is running Vista and I had the Power Options set to turn off the monitor after "20 minutes" and put computer to sleep to "never". With these settings the computer was drawing between 110 and 140 Watts of power with a total average

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October 2008

1st Wed. (10/1)
7 p.m. Annual Meeting & Club Elections!

4th Wed (10/22)
7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (10/20)
7 p.m. Board of Directors

All meetings are at **Carlin Hall**, 5711 S. 4th St., Arlington VA: East off of Carlin Springs Rd, just south of Arlington Blvd/Route 50.

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of 2.63 KWH (kill-a-watt hours) per day. Cost per day was $.026 ($7.87 a month) based on my most recent bill.

I then changed the Power Options to turn off the monitor after "20 minutes" and put computer to sleep "after 2 hours".

The watts dropped from between 110 and 140 while I was using the computer to 6 while in the sleep mode and the total average of KWH dropped to 0.65 per day. Cost is now down to 6 cents a day ($1.94 a month).

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